



Cause of worry: The site of the Bekok Dam in Labis, Johor. (Inset) Dr Wee showing a picture of the site which is being encroached by farmers.

Dam's safety under threat

Encroachment leading to water contamination

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LABIS: Farmers have encroached into the Bekok Dam, posing a threat to the water catchment area and contaminating the reservoir with chemicals.

State Drainage and Irrigation Department director Chong Chee Han said the long-standing issue had become the main focus for the state government, as the dam served close to half a million people.

He pointed out that the state secretary had called for a meeting with relevant agencies to tackle the issue.

"The state government will gazette the Bekok Dam as a water catchment area soon to make sure there is no more encroachment," he said.

The chemicals, including fertilisers and diesel-powered machinery, are used to plant crops in the area near the dam.

This poses a threat as the chemicals will be absorbed into the soil or washed into the dam during a downpour.

Chong also said the 2008 Auditor-General's Report had stated that there was rampant encroachment by plantations and farmers into the Bekok Dam and that vast tracks of land around catchment areas, totalling almost 100,000ha, had yet to be gazetted.

Syarikat Air Johor Holdings (SAJ) Sdn Bhd corporate communication manager Jama-luddin Jamil said it had taken measures to ensure the water was safe for consumption.

"However, SAJ may face problems in the

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— **CHONG CHEE HAN**

future if the encroachment and pollution continue to contaminate the water at the dam," he said.

State Water Regulatory Authority director Idris Kaparawi said water quality at 15 dams state-wide was acceptable according to World Health Organisation and Health Ministry guidelines.

"The authorities have carried out regular checks at all dams in the state where we have found nothing," he said.

Meanwhile, Ayer Hitam MP Datuk Dr Wee Ka Siong said he had informed Mentri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman about the matter and urged the state and federal governments to take immediate action.

He added that 500,000 users might face health risks, including cancer, if steps were not taken quickly to stop the encroachment.

"At the moment, there is only one security guard on duty at the Bekok Dam, which is almost the size of Singapore, in an eight-hour shift in two sessions.

"One security guard is not enough to guard the area and stop encroachment," he said.